Choosing the correct camera is pivotal to superintendent’s success

By J. BARRY MOTHES

Choosing a new camera can be confusing business. But understanding what kind of camera you need is the best way to start making photography work for you as a golf course superintendent. The “point and shoot” cameras, the small, pocket-size automatics that are popular tourist cameras, are obviously easy to use. But except for increasingly sophisticated models made by top-of-the-line manufacturers like Nikon, Olympus and even Leica — those that start at $200 and up with zoom lenses — these are not really the best camera for the job. If you insist on the convenience and size of these cameras, make sure you’re looking at the $200 price point and above.

Otherwise, your prints will probably not do justice to your hard work. Beyond that, most camera dealers don’t even recommend shooting slide film in “point-and-shoot” situations except for higher-end models.

Choosing the correct camera is crucial to your job.

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You don’t have to be the next Ansel Adams. But understanding how and when to use a camera on and around the golf course could make you a far more effective superintendent.

As the old cliche goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and this can be especially true when it comes to a golf course. Good, clear, well-taken photographs and slides can provide crucial information and documentation for everything from turf diseases to irrigation projects and plantings.

They can be a valuable tool when meeting with greens committees, club managers, and even insurance companies. It’s given my greens committee a better outlook on my job. We’ve made tremendous improvements to the course.

Lewis says he started using a camera as part of the job 11 years ago. He now keeps it (a Pentax with manual and automatic capabilities) and several rolls of color film handy in his desk in the maintenance shop to carry with him on his daily rounds.

Last summer, Lewis used the camera to record an ongoing irrigation project, several brush and undergrowth clearings, two major tee construction projects, and hundreds of plantings on the course and around the clubhouse. He and his staff also used the camera to capture the broad variety of birds, animals, plants, trees and bushes on the grounds as part of an application to the Audubon Society’s Cooperative Golf Course Sanctuary program. Thanks partly to the photographs, the club has been certified in four of the six categories.

Several camera-toting superintendents say photographs and slides can be particularly effective for:

- documenting the “before” and “after” for golf course construction, renovation or restructuring projects like greens, bunkers, tees, bridges, paths and plantings.
- documenting changes in sunlight on important areas like greens.
- tracking “works-in-progress,” especially projects like irrigation that are eventually buried beyond sight.
- documenting machinery and valuable equipment.

Terry Buchen says he takes a picture of “everything” he and his crew use so that he can provide better evidence of ownership in case of damages or theft for insurance purposes.

Buchen, a 24-year veteran superintendent who says he “always has a camera” with him and keeps two cameras ready at all times (one with print film, one with color film), says he “always has a camera” with him and keeps two cameras ready at all times (one with print film, one with color film), says he “always has a camera” with him and keeps two cameras ready at all times (one with print film, one with color film), says he “always has a camera” with him and keeps two cameras ready at all times (one with print film, one with color film), says he “always has a camera” with him and keeps two cameras ready at all times (one with print film, one with color film). Using a camera can record such problems as this strip of dark green fairway. It was caused by a natural source of nitrogen.

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